

PETTICOAT WARS SHAKE SOCIETY IN WASHINGTON



Mrs. Robert
M. La Follette.

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Mrs. Woodrow
Wilson

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Mrs. Wm.
Jennings Bryan

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Mrs. Thomas
R. Marshall.

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Madame
Jusserand

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Wives of Cabinet Members Object of Two Attacks Already This Winter in Social Warfare

PETTICOAT wars have disturbed every Administration in Washington. The bang of the guns of two such imbrolios has already shaken the capital this winter. No sooner had the smoke of one battle cleared than another began.

The first clash was between the wives of Representatives and the wives of members of the Cabinet. The latter hoisted the white flag.

The second declaration of war has been made by the wives of Senators, and again the women of the Cabinet are the object of attack. Indeed, the latter have been the chief victims of Washington petticoat wars during the last generation. Socially, they have also been the most overworked women in official life.

During each social season they keep open house once a week, when they receive and serve refreshments to vast assemblages of callers, some of them "lunch route fiends," who have no acquaintance with their hostesses. They also receive with the President's wife at the formal White House functions. On account of these many social obligations they have hitherto been exempted from the duty of returning calls in person, except upon persons of higher official rank. Usage has permitted them to return other calls by card only.

Unquestionably, the wives of the Representatives rank below the wives of the Cabinet members in the social order of precedence, according to which a man's wife shares his official rank. No one has disputed this social superiority of Cabinet wives over Representatives' wives, nor have the latter demanded first calls of the former. But it so befell that somebody raked up the old rule that Cabinet women should not return calls in person, upon their social inferiors, and by distorting the facts so aimed them at the women of the House circle that the latter took offense.

There are more new women in the House circle this winter than within many years. Few of the old social leaders of the House circle remained in Washington. So the liveliest petticoat war that Washington has seen in a dozen years was brewed.

Social war correspondents went from camp to camp, fanning the flame. And finally Mrs. William Jennings Bryan, who, by virtue of her husband's premiership, leads the Cabinet circle, capitulated to the extent of issuing a statement that the ladies of the Cabinet "intend, as far as possible, to return such calls." Inasmuch as there are 435 Representatives, Washington society is wondering how the women of the Cabinet will get a quarter way around this circle within the short social season, which lasts only from December to Lent.

But the petticoat war between the Senate and the Cabinet had meantime broken out. The wives of the Senate have borne a chip upon their shoulders ever since the passage of the law

of succession, which removed the Senate from the line of succession to the Presidency in the event that the President should die while there was no Vice-President. Formerly the ranking member of the Senate, its president pro tempore, was in the line of succession to the Presidency, as was the Speaker of the House, but by the law of succession Congress took itself out of the line of succession and put the Cabinet in its place.

This has been the basis of the subsequent claim that the Cabinet outranks the Senate. However, the Cabinet itself has not urged this claim. To this day it has required its wives to pay first calls upon the wives of Senators.

"Fear of Senatorial power over our husbands has prevented our open revolt," said a Cabinet wife, of several Administrations back, commenting on this concession. "The demand by the wives of Senators that we call upon them first is a species of social blackmail to which we are compelled to submit."

Why, then, do the matrons of the Senate circle now declare social warfare against the Cabinet circle? Not on account of a first-call grievance, but because, they complain, that at public appearances and official functions Cabinet members and their wives have been placed by the masters of ceremonies before Senators and their spouses. So the Senate's wives, in Amazonian phalanx, have just now sent their general to strike her scimitar three times upon the tent of Mrs. Bryan and demand precedence over Cabinet women at all social functions of an official nature.

The Senate women have found an eager and zealous champion in the person of the widowed Senator Bacon of Georgia, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, which deals, among other matters, with usages pertaining to our polite intercourse with foreign courts.

The declaration of war has been induced by Senator Bacon. In it he first calls attention to the "fundamental and controlling fact that the Constitution of the United States creates no offices except that of the Presidency and Vice-Presidency, the Supreme Court and the Congress, composed of the Senate and House of Representatives." "All other offices of the United States, excepting only three above mentioned, have been created by act of Congress," wrote the Senator, with the Cabinet especially in mind.

"It is a plain proposition," he added, "that the creature cannot be greater than the creator." And he pointed out that Congress can at any time abolish any of these offices.

The social rank of the Cabinet wives has been disputed not only by the matrons of the Senate but also by those of the Supreme Court, and so vexed has the question become that the White House for some time has avoided the issue by asking the Cabinet and its wives to receive with the President and his wife instead of assigning them a definite place in the line of guests.

One Cabinet office to which the Senate might, "as a proper courtesy," yield precedence, Mr. Bacon concedes, is that of Secretary of State, now filled by William Jennings Bryan. This is because the premier of the Cabinet is the immediate representative of the President in foreign relations and because his office existed under the Confederation before the adoption of the Constitution and the creation of the Presidency.

A new order of precedence for home officials, according to Mr. Bacon's notions, therefore would be: President, Vice-President, Supreme Court, Secretary of State, Senate, House of Representatives and Cabinet.

This innovation would place Mrs. Bryan upon the social ladder above the wives of the entire Congress, including Mrs. Champ Clark, wife of the Speaker, a lady so amiable that she will probably make no remonstrance. At the same time the other wives of the Cabinet will be left five hundred and thirty-odd rungs of the ladder below Mrs. Bryan.

The Senate, because of its special powers, has disputed the social rank of every high functionary in Washington except the President and Vice-President, and upon the theory that "the creature cannot be greater than the creator" it is to be wondered that it did not claim precedence over President John Quincy Adams because he was elected by Congress rather than by the people, not to mention Vice-President Richard Johnson, who came to office by the same route.

A bitter petticoat war resulted some years ago from claims of Senators that they preceded the Chief Justice and the



Senator Bacon
of Georgia

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Mrs. "Champ" Clark

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other members of the highest tribunal of the land, which can undo what even the Senate does. But in this encounter the Senate capitulated.

Then came another feud between the Senate matrons and those of the for-

ign Diplomatic Corps resident in Washington. Many old timers remember a scene made at a fashionable function when a Senator's wife raised an uproar because her host escorted to the dining room not herself but the wife of the ranking foreign diplomat present.

One matron of the Senate circle who is not taking the present squabble very much to heart is Mrs. Robert M. La Follette, wife of the Republican Senator from Wisconsin. She believes, like Thomas Jefferson, that in a democracy like ours there is no place for precedence. But Senator Bacon, although a leader of the Jeffersonian party, says that for Senators to "forego all distinctions of rank" is "impossible in the official circles of Washington," where they will "prefer not to be present at any function, public or private, where this proper rank is not recognized and accorded to them."

What Jeffersonian simplicity did to the order of precedence more than a century ago would put an end to all of these petticoat wars of the present time. But it would also bring out of such social order as is now maintained a chaos which no official of even a Democratic administration would risk.

The original order of precedence was established by Washington after many consultations with Adams, Madison, Jay and Hamilton, the latter's advice prevailing. Adams conscientiously observed the code adopted by his illustrious predecessor, but Jefferson upset it with a vandalism comparable only to that of the proverbial bull in the china shop.

Branding it as "aristocratic foppery," he laid aside the order of precedence,

Women in Official Society Are Vexed Over Question of Social Precedence—Senator Bacon's Views

ruling that all Federal officials should be regarded as equal when brought together in society. He instructed that his guests should take their places in the order of their arrival at the White House. To his receptions every one was admitted. Many officials, denied precedence in line, absented themselves. And Dolly Madison, who at these jams had acted as official hostess of the widowed Jefferson, because she was the wife of the Secretary of State, was more than glad to revive the order of precedence when her husband succeeded the sage of Monticello.

But Jackson again threw the White House open to all in the order of first come, first served, and riots ensued, the state parlors being nearly wrecked. Thereafter the orderly code was again invoked, and all subsequent official hosts and hostesses have been glad to seek safe shelter beneath it.

However, the strict order of precedence came to be interpreted differently by different official hosts and hostesses. This was so especially after the old Powers of Europe began to deem us worthy of Ambassadors rather than mere Ministers. And thus until this day you will find the President at White House entertainments giving the Ambassadors precedence over the Supreme Court, but the Congress, at all ceremonies at the Capitol, giving the Supreme Court precedence over the Ambassadors.

"Sometimes two great Powers are upon the eve of destroying each other merely because two silly ladies have squabbled," was the great Napoleon's warning to the wife of his Ambassador departing for Lisbon.

The Emperor had diplomatic woes generally in mind when he thus admonished the Duchess d'Abrantes. And that sensitiveness which he feared in his day is ever dreaded by our State Department when it makes out the schedule of precedence for all executive functions of an official nature.

So the Diplomatic Corps causes more anxiety than any other body of officials resident in Washington. Ambassadors, House entertainments giving the Ambassadors precedence over the Supreme Court, but the Congress, at all ceremonies at the Capitol, giving the Supreme Court precedence over the Ambassadors.

A pretty fuss was brewed some years ago by an official dinner host who conferred the seat of honor upon the British envoy, although the Spanish representative, who was dean of the Diplomatic Corps, was present. The Spaniard protested forthwith, but the Secretary of State, who was luckily present, restored the entente cordiale by inducing the dean—always so called because he is the foreign representative of longest service in Washington.

A row between the Cabinet and Diplomatic Corps broke out during the socially chaotic regime of Jackson, one whose Cabinet members outranked the delicate sensibilities of the French Minister, Count Serrurier, by disputing a place in the state dinner procession. The upshot of it all was that the Count sulked without while Old Hickory's viands were being enjoyed by others.

The Vice-President's rank was disputed by the dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Sir Julian Pauncefote, during the Cleveland Administration, and the President yielded to the British Ambassador, but Mr. McKinley reversed the ruling on the ground that the offices of President and Vice-President were inseparable and that the Vice-President bears the same relative rank as the President to a foreign throne.

Whether the Vice-President ranked as Chief Justice is a question still debated in some drawing rooms of the capital, and cautious hosts do not invite two officials to the same dinner, for fear of a dispute which can never be settled. Others also hesitate to dignify the Chief Justice and the Secretary of State.

Of course, it goes without saying that the wife of each high official has her social rank, according to this or that work precedence code.

Next how do the wives of the high officials stand on the social ladder? The first lady in the land is, of course, Mrs. Woodrow Wilson.

The second lady in the land is Mrs. Thomas R. Marshall, wife of the Vice-President.

The third lady in the land is Madame Jusserand, the wife of the French Ambassador and dean of the Diplomatic Corps. This is the view of the Department of State, which, Senator Bacon admits, adjusts such matters. But according to the Congressional view, the rank should be given to Mrs. Richard D. White, wife of the Chief Justice, whom the State Department placed after the Ambassadors' wives.

Next comes Mrs. William Jennings Bryan and after her, in the State Department's view, the other ladies of the Cabinet, but according to the Senate view, the wives of Senators.

The first lady of the Senate circle is Mrs. Henry Cabot Lodge, wife of a senior Senator who has a wife of his own.

This honor would go to the wife of the President pro tempore, Senator of Arkansas, had he a wife. But the first lady of the House of Representatives circle is Mrs. Champ Clark, wife of the Speaker.

New Year's Day is always a social judgment in Washington, and then the President's most ceremonious lines up officialdom, gives each his rank in the order of precedence. Perhaps it was dread of an ordeal that prompted the President to abandon his New Year levee this year. But he was only postponing the inevitable.

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